

XLVIII.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

We have received the following letters addressed to the Editors of 'The Ibis : '—

Swatow, June 11, 1887.

SIRS,—In Mr. F. W. Styan's article on a collection of birds made by me in Foochow (Ibis, April 1887, p. 215) some misprints have crept in.

Shinkow should be Shuikow.

Ching Feng Lung ,, Ching Feng Ling.

To Feng Sen ,, ngO Feng Ssu.

(see pp. 216, 218, 222, 230.)

The following should be added to the list of Foochow birds :—

1. *HALIAËTUS ALBICILLA* (?).

Sea Eagles passed in some numbers during last autumn. I have a specimen not yet identified, but which, from descriptions, appears to be of this species.

2. *HYPsipETES MACCLELLANDI*.

Two specimens were shot at the end of February, in the valley of the Min river, about 20 or 30 miles from Foochow.

3. *PARUS VENUSTULUS*, Swinh.

One shot near Châng Lo Hsien, a city on the mainland, some 13 miles south-east of Foochow.

4. *CYPSELUS PACIFICUS* (?).

Large Swifts occur on the Min river, near Foochow, in April, but are only seen on rainy days.

5. *BUBO IGNAVUS*.

A couple of young Eagle Owls were obtained about six years ago by Dr. Underwood, of Pagoda Anchorage (the shipping-place of Foochow). He says they were certainly obtained in the neighbourhood. This species seems unknown to the natives. °

LIOTHRIX LUTEUS

Has also been obtained near Foochow. A specimen was shot, out of a party of three, at the end of January last.

SUTHORA SUFFUSA (?).

A *Suthora*, as far as I can remember identical with that from Puching mentioned by Mr. Styan, was shot last spring, close to Foochow, by Mr. C. W. Campbell.

MICROHIERAX CHINENSIS.

Seems to be not very uncommon in the valley of the Min river, another specimen (this time a male, in fine plumage) having been shot for me by a native sportsman in March last. Mr. Baun also collected three specimens in the neighbourhood of Shuikow, Ching Feng Ling, &c.

Yours faithfully,

J. DE LA TOUCHE.

3 Kensington Gardens Square,
July 14, 1887.

SIRS,—With reference to Sir John Campbell-Orde's observation of *Cypselus apus* in North Uist, I may state that this species is an irregular visitor to the opposite coast of Skye, and it has occurred even at St. Kilda, a specimen having been shot in the latter island in May 1886 by Mr. John Mackenzie, of Dunvegan. There is nothing, therefore, surprising in its straying to North Uist. With reference to St. Kilda, I may add that the late schoolmaster, George Murray, informs me that a single example of *Larus glaucus* made its appearance in the bay in November 1886; that the only example of *Larus ridibundus* ever seen at St. Kilda arrived on April 13th, 1887; and that he observed a specimen of *Chelidon urbica* on June 9th.

Yours &c.,

H. A. MACPHERSON.

Direction des Königl. Zoologischen und des
Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden,
July 21, 1887.

SIRS,—Mr. H. Seebohm, in his interesting paper "On the genus *Scolopax*" (The Ibis, 1886, p. 128), remarks of *Scolopax rochusseni*: "The Moluccan Woodcock is confined to the small group of islands the name of which it bears, whither it probably emigrated from Japan."

I beg to say that there does not exist, so far as I am aware, a group of islands with the name of Rochussen, but that the species *Scolopax rochusseni* came from the island of Obi major, an island of some importance to the south of the largest Moluccan island called Halmahera (erroneously often designated as Gilolo, which is only a district of Halmahera).

Scolopax rochusseni, from Obi major, was called by Prof. Schlegel (Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor de Dierkunde, iii. p. 256, 1866) after the Governor-General Rochussen, in the following passage:—

“ Nous dédions cette espèce curieuse à Son Excellence le Ministre d'état, M. Rochussen, ancien Gouverneur-général des Indes Néerlandaises et ancien Ministre des Colonies, qui a donné l'élan à l'exploration récente de la Nouvelle-Guinée par l'expédition du bateau à vapeur l'Etna, et en confiant à feu Bernstein la mission honorable de faire des recherches scientifiques dans ces contrées lointaines et presque inconnues.”

Yours,
A. B. MEYER.

British Museum (Natural History),
Cromwell Road, London, S.W.
Sept. 6, 1887.

SIRS,—From Mr. Seebohm's article on Horsfield's Woodcock (*antea*, p. 284) it might be inferred that some of the types of Horsfield's species, formerly in the India Museum, cannot now be found in their present home in the Natural History Museum. I have found the type of the species alluded to by Mr. Seebohm, and I am not aware that any of the Horsfieldian types are actually *missing*, but they are mostly in the same state as the typical example of *Gallinago horsfieldi*, viz. moth-eaten and devoid of feathers. It appears that during the many migrations of the India Museum from Leadenhall Street to Fife House and other places, the birds were always packed up, and the Horsfieldian types, being probably old and imperfectly preserved, were utterly devoured by moths. The gruesome remains were received by

us from the India Museum in the condition they now are, and I write this short note of explanation, as otherwise in future years it might be thought that the specimens had been allowed to perish while under my care.

I am, &c.,

R. BOWDLER SHARPE.

SIRS,—We were not a little surprised after reading Mr. Seebohm's paper on the "Birds of Natal," in the July No. of 'The Ibis,' to find that in the short period of one month's observation he had been able to arrive at the conclusion (p. 346) that there is not "a shred of evidence" in favour of the theory which we advanced in 'The Ibis' for 1883 respecting the various changes of plumage of *Saxicola monticola*. It will be remembered by those who read our paper that for the greater part of the year 1881 we had the most favourable opportunity of observing the plumage, habits, and nidification of this species, and for upwards of ten months we made a special study of this subject in the field, collecting a very large series of skins in every stage of plumage, which we brought home carefully labelled and in perfect preservation. Having submitted these skins (which are now in Capt. Shelley's museum) to Mr. R. B. Sharpe for examination, and having at the same time looked over the skins in the South Kensington Museum, we had no difficulty, with so large a series before us and the knowledge of the species which we had acquired in the field, in deciding this long-discussed question. Mr. Sharpe, who is ever ready to give assistance in such matters, was good enough to give his careful attention to the subject in our presence, and to view the skins after we had arranged them in order, showing the various changes of plumage, as described subsequently in our paper; and he agreed with us, without hesitation, that our theory was correct, as will be seen by his remarks which followed (p. 337). Now with the above facts fresh in our memory we can hardly be expected to admit that we are entirely wrong, that our time and labours in Natal were therefore wasted, and that Mr. Seebohm's decision, after so little field-expe-

rience, is correct. Mr. Seebohm's favourite theory of interbreeding is all very well in some cases, but it certainly does not apply in this instance, as there is only one form of hen bird.

In our paper, at p. 336, line 13, there is, unfortunately, a clerical error, which we corrected in 'The Ibis' for October 1884, p. 466, and to which we again call attention. Under the head 6th stage, *for* "We consider stages 6 and 7 to be of about the same period of the bird's life," *read* "We consider stages 5 and 6," &c.

Mr. Seebohm misunderstands us in saying "It is alleged that the brown of the underparts changes first to white, *then to black*, &c.," as will be seen by referring to the paragraph below the 9th stage, in which it is clearly stated that the brown or blackish brown changes to pure white, the lower parts never change, so far as our knowledge goes, from white to black afterwards. In some instances, however, the white head is gained before the white belly (6th stage), while in others the white belly is assumed before the head changes as described in the 5th stage, the result being that at this stage birds which have not shed their abdominal feathers are still black below, others which have commenced the moult are black with traces of white, and those which have completed it are white. Stages 5 and 6 are therefore very similar, the difference between them being that in the 5th stage the bird has assumed the white lower parts, and in the 6th it has not completed the moult in respect to those parts. The 6th stage is not very common, and we only obtained a few examples in that plumage, and most of those showed traces of white below, as previously stated, showing the gradual change from black to white. We consider stages 5 and 6 to be two phases of the one stage, and they might perhaps have been advantageously united. Mr. Seebohm considers that it would be as logical to make the variations nineteen as nine in number; but for the purpose of explaining our theory we found the nine stages given sufficient.

In conclusion we may remark that, notwithstanding Mr. Seebohm's decision, we are still of opinion that our theory is

correct, but we leave the readers of 'The Ibis' to judge for themselves.

E. A. BUTLER.

H. W. FEILDEN.

S. G. REID.

5th September, 1887.

Emin Pacha on the Birds of Lake Albert, Eastern Equatorial Africa.—"All along the river and in the lake I was struck with the relatively small number of species of water-birds. Further north, in the Bahr-el-Abiad, between 12° and 15° north lat., water-birds and marsh-birds occur in innumerable flocks, while to the south, in the localities mentioned, one cannot find a single duck or a single goose. And although we can explain this marked difference, for the winter-season (November to March) at least, by the fact that large numbers of European emigrants on their way to the south do not proceed beyond the marshy track between Sobat and Ghaba Shambé, still this will not account for the paucity of species and of numbers of species which do occur in localities that are so eminently suited for them further south. *Ardea alba* and *A. comata* went on fishing around the steamer, quite regardless of the bustle; and a little further away I noticed specimens of *Anastomus lamelligerus*, *Plotus levaillanti*, and *Phalacrocorax africanus*. A few jabirus (*Mycteria senegalensis*) were searching an inundated, low-lying piece of land; and, on the margin of the lake, a few Egyptian Geese (*Chenalopex ægyptiacus*) showed themselves. With the Pelicans mentioned above as having been observed in the river I close the list. Not a single plover was seen, nor yet a strand-snipe or a duck."—(Extract from 'The Scottish Geographical Magazine,' June 1887, p. 276.)

Nesting of the Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*).—In the Mitth. d. Orn. Ver. in Wien (xi. Jahrg. nr. 5 & 6), Herr Edm. Pfanni has given an interesting account of his adven-

tures after Nutcrackers' nests in Lower Austria, near Lilienfeld. As is well known, the difficulty with this bird is that it breeds very early in the season, before the winter's snow is off the ground in the inclement regions which this bird frequents, and, indeed, it begins to nest while fresh snow is still falling. After several unsuccessful attempts, Herr Pfanni began a new search on the 17th March, in a large pine forest in which he had seen young Nutcrackers the previous summer, and in which he was therefore pretty certain that this bird must breed. In spite of the trees being covered with fresh snow and the great cold, many trees with nests in them were found and ascended. But most of these nests appeared to be old squirrels' dreys. The next day, in the same forest, after several hours' search, he discovered what appeared to be in all probability a two-years old nest of the Nutcracker. It was placed on a pine about 15 feet from the ground, and corresponded in every way to undoubted nests of Nutcrackers that had been taken in Switzerland. But this was as far as could be got on the 18th and 19th of March. On the 20th came a warm day, and the snow disappeared from the trees. The morning was spent in rain in a neighbouring wood of mixed trees. In the afternoon Herr Pfanni resolved, as a last resource, to devote himself to a steep south-eastern sloping hanger, in which patches of pine-forest were mixed with other trees and clearings. At 2 o'clock he left the house, and after a walk of three quarters of an hour began the search, taking one group of pines after another. He had been at work about half an hour, when at a lighter spot in a clump of firs he observed above him a thick place in the foliage which appeared to be a nest, and on careful observation descried what appeared to be a bird's tail protruding therefrom. Upon pelting the nest with snowballs, the tail suddenly vanished and the head and bill of a Nutcracker appeared in its place. When his excitement at this discovery had somewhat cooled down, Herr Pfanni endeavoured to frighten the bird off her nest by clapping his hands. This manœuvre proving ineffectual, he climbed up a neighbouring beech tree to about the same height as the

nest, and only when he could just see into it did the mother quickly and silently glide off. Two eggs, not quite alike, lay in it. Thinking more eggs would be laid, and wishing his companion, Herr Reiser, to see the nest, he left the spot. On returning next day, Herr Pfanni saw the bird quit her post in exactly the same fashion as on the previous occasion. The eggs had not increased in number, and it was evident that the bird was sitting hard.

Herr Reiser, who accompanied Herr Pfanni when the eggs were finally taken, adds to the paper some notes on the structure of the nest and eggs. The nest was placed about 15 feet from the ground, upon the branches of a pine some 21 feet high, on the side of the tree facing the valley; it was composed of twigs of the larch, bird-cherry, and other trees, and lined with dried grasses and straws and a few roots, but with very little moss, and was smaller in size than is usual with this bird. The eggs were very like those of the Jackdaw; even when examined with a magnifier they showed but little difference. Taken on March 23rd, they appeared to have been incubated about five or six days; they differed slightly from one another in size, shape, and markings, of which exact particulars are recorded by Herr Reiser.

A new Fossil Bird from the Wealden.—In the May number of the 'Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society' (p. 206), Prof. H. G. Seeley finds a new type of bird, *Ornithodesmus cluniculus*, on some remains from the Wealden in the British Museum. The differences which the fossil shows from existing birds are three: first, the small number of vertebræ in the sacrum; secondly, the absence of the sacral recesses from the middle lobes of the kidneys; and, thirdly, the form of the articular face of the first sacral vertebra. Fossil birds lessen the importance of these differences: first the *Archæopteryx* has as few vertebræ in the sacrum, while *Ichthyornis dispar* has no renal recesses in the middle of the sacrum; and the Gannet makes a sufficiently near approximation to the form of the articulation to remove any improbability as to its being a modified avian form. Prof. Seeley submits,

on the evidence of the resemblances and considerations which he discusses, that *Ornithodesmus* was probably a bird, but that it differed from existing birds so as to suggest that it was a link towards lower forms. It cannot be placed in any existing division of the class, but approximates towards the Dinosaurs in a way of which no bird had previously given evidence.

Guácharo-shooting in Trinidad.—The Report of the U.S. Fish-Commission for 1884 contains an interesting narrative of the cruise of the steamer 'Albatross' in the Caribbean Sea in the early months of that year, prepared by Mr. Benedict, the naturalist of the expedition. From Port of Spain, Trinidad, an excursion was made to the caves of the Guácharo-bird (*Steatornis caripensis*), which are described as follows:—

"At half-past 7 on the morning of February 1, Captain Tanner and four members of the scientific staff left the ship in the steam-launch for Mono Island, 10 miles distant, and near where the birds we were in search of live in caves. When nearly there Mr. Garrett and Mr. Ackerman were left on a small island to collect until the return of the launch. The others kept on to Mono Island, where the captain found Mr. Morrison, to whom he had been directed as the best guide to the caves. Mr. Morrison consented to go with us in search of the birds.

"From this place we steamed around the island to Trinidad, and tried to enter a cave there inhabited by the Guácharo-birds. The larger caves on Huevos Island were then too much exposed to the ocean to be accessible, and at any season can be approached only on occasional days, when the water is very smooth.

"We found the cave on the western side of Trinidad too much exposed to enter with anything like safety, though several attempts were made. We were finally obliged to give it up, to our great disappointment. The entire floor of the cave is water. As a swell advances inwards, innocent at first, it becomes angry and dangerous long before it reaches the farther end, where it brings up with a heavy booming

sound, leaving jagged rocks briefly exposed in its wake. The entrance to the chamber where the birds live is about 10 feet high, 12 feet wide at the bottom, and 50 feet long. The chamber is about 40 feet in diameter at its base and 35 feet high. A coloured man was employed to take us in in his canoe. Mr. Morrison assisted in the management of it, while Mr. Nye and myself held our guns in readiness. We were backed in about 35 feet, when a breaker boarded us, half filling the canoe with water, and we came out as soon as possible. The canoe being too heavily loaded, I got out, and the others went in again. This time Mr. Nye succeeded in shooting two birds, but before he could secure them another breaker boarded them, and again partly filled the boat. The swells becoming heavier, we considered it unsafe to venture into the cave again; however, being very desirous of obtaining the birds, we adopted another plan, which was to shoot them as they came out at night. Captain Tanner thought well of this and went back to the ship, leaving Mr. Nye and myself to carry out the plan, with Mr. Morrison's assistance, at whose house the greater part of the afternoon was pleasantly spent. Towards night we went into a grove of cocoanut-palms and killed a number of birds. Before dark we were again at the cave in a canoe. Mr. Nye landed and obtained as good a position as the nature of the ground would allow, while I remained in the boat near the cave to shoot as best I could against the face of the precipitous hill which rises above it. The birds did not come out until after dark, when it was possible to see them only against the sky. Nevertheless, Mr. Nye killed two, only one of which was recovered, and that after it had been in the water for half an hour."

Important Additions to the New York Museum.—We learn from the July No. of 'The Auk' that the American Museum of Natural History of New York City has recently received several important additions to the Department of Ornithology. One of these is the acquisition by presentation of Mr. D. G. Elliot's superb collection of Humming-birds, numbering over 400 species, represented by about 2000 specimens, and in-

cluding some fifty or more types, a collection which formed the basis of his recent monograph of the family. Next comes the addition, by purchase, of Mr. George N. Lawrence's collection, comprising about 3000 species and some 300 types of birds from North America, Mexico, the West Indies, Central and South America—a reference collection of high value, inasmuch as it contains the types of nearly all the species described by our veteran Foreign Member. By purchase also the Museum has acquired 4000 bird-skins, belonging to about 300 species, with about 150 clutches of identified eggs, obtained by Mr. H. Smith in the province of Matto Grosso, Brazil (*suprà*, p. 244). In the exhibition-series of birds, eighteen elaborate "group pieces," arranged in twelve cases placed in the alcoves of the "Bird Floor," illustrate the nesting-habits of the species represented, after the plan adopted in our Natural History Museum at Kensington. The funds for these groups, and for some twenty more which will be added in the course of the year, are supplied by the generosity of Mrs. Robert E. Stuart, an atonement-offering for the sins of the American plume-wearers, which may be recommended for imitation by English ladies. Lastly, Mr. D. G. Elliot's fine ornithological library, comprising about 1000 volumes, has been purchased and presented to the Museum by Messrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt and Percy R. Pyne, two of its trustees. We heartily congratulate Professor J. A. Allen on these acquisitions by the Department over which he so worthily presides.

OBITUARY.—We regret to record the death of a promising young naturalist, Mr. THOMAS HENRY BOWYER BOWER, who was already known for his explorations in the interior of Queensland, where he procured many interesting species, among the principal being *Cracticus rufescens* and *Scenopæus dentirostris*. Last year he proceeded to Western Australia, accompanied by Mr. Walter Burton, and made large collections on the Fitzroy River, the bulk of which, however, were lost by a disastrous fire in the camp; and he unfortunately contracted a sharp attack of fever, which developed into typhoid at Port Darwin, where he died last January in his

twenty-fifth year. His father, Capt. Bowyer Bower, has presented nearly the whole of his son's collection to the British Museum.

Sir JULIUS VON HAAST, K.C.M.G., F.R.S., who died suddenly at Bonn (his birthplace) on the 15th of August last, was for years a prominent figure among the zoologists of New Zealand. Born in 1824, he accompanied Professor Hochstetter on the 'Novara' Expedition in 1858, and subsequently, as Director of the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, he did excellent scientific work. From the purely ornithological point of view he will be remembered in connexion with his researches on the extinction of *Dinornis*; but his loss will be felt by many who experienced his courtesy last year at the Colonial Exhibition.

By the death of Professor SPENCER FULLERTON BAIRD the British Ornithologists' Union has lost one of the oldest of its Honorary Members. Born at Reading, Pennsylvania, on February 3, 1823, he formed in 1838 a friendship with Audubon, who, in 1842, handed over to the young naturalist the greater part of his collection of birds, including many types of new species. The first printed paper which bears his name is a description of two new species of Flycatchers in 1843, and in 1846 he was engaged in the preparation of a synonymy of North American birds. In 1850 he was appointed Assistant-Secretary at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, succeeding to the secretaryship upon the death of Professor Henry in 1878. Such standard works as 'The Birds of North America' (1858), the 'Review of North American Birds,' and the 'History of North American Birds' (1874-84), the latter in conjunction with the late Dr. Brewer and Mr. R. Ridgway, testify to his ornithological attainments; while the flourishing condition of the Smithsonian Institution, and of the United States National Museum, of which he was also Director as well as Fisheries Commissioner, prove his enormous capacity for organization. His death, which took place at Wood's Holl, Massachusetts, on August 22nd last, will be deeply regretted, especially by those who enjoyed the privilege of his personal acquaintance.